

Documents on Diplomacy: Introduction

One Dozen Lesson-Building Tips

or

"How to Write Lessons Like Ours"

By Nancy R. Cope

There are many theoretical models to apply in planning lessons, and the key to which ones you choose is based on how well you know your students and the expectations you will be setting for them. As teachers, we want vertical development overall and not just horizontal development. (Doing the same thing already learned again and again but in a different format) It also depends on what type documents you wish to have the students use in the lesson: primary source, contemporary, essays, news articles, web-based sites, or even student work.

Step One: Determine your national, state, and local curriculum goals and objectives and standards. Write them down, then determine how you will use them in your lesson.

Step Two: What do you want the students to be able to do by the end of the lesson? The verbs you choose must be measurable, like "record, write, sing, tell, or rewrite." In other words, how can they show evidence that they learned or mastered the material today?

Step Three: Prior knowledge. How have you determined what they already know about this topic? How will you find out? Do you need to give a little background for this lesson to be successful? Do you need to demonstrate some enthusiasm for the items you want them to use? Tease and invite them to read to find out something of interest.

Step Four: What materials will you need? Think this through carefully as you do not want to take time during a lesson to find out the projector is unplugged. What do you need to have ready to make the lesson flow? What do the students need? Keep in mind as you plan this lesson: What is the teacher doing and what are the students doing?

Step Five: Your hook. The first 8 seconds of a class will determine if the students pay attention. Think of something that will get their attention as soon as they walk into the classroom. Show something, post something, say something that fits their thinking to get and keep their attention. (You will see evidence of this important step in these lessons)

Step Six: What strategy will you use to help students acquire the knowledge in your lesson? The teen brain responds well to dramatization, novelty, patterns, movement, music, etc. It does not respond well to sitting and listening. *They must be doing something* to keep the brain engaged. How will you accomplish this in your lesson?

Step Seven: Variety during a lesson is important, especially if it is a 90-minute class. You want to build in moving time, quiet time, action time, reflection time, etc, so there is an ebb and flow to the lesson that keeps the students progressing through the lesson. The length of any one section should not exceed the age of the student times two. Build all of the changes into the lesson.

Step Eight: How will you manage the different completion rates of the students? Will there be choices for those who finish early? How will you get them to actually read the documents? Devise a clever plan using the latest strategies. You want no down time for any individual or team effort. Have your back-up plans written down.

Step Nine: As the lesson progresses, when will you collect materials the students produce? At the end or in the middle of the lesson? Will you distribute other items? And how will you assess them? Write this all down.

Step Ten: Class Talk should be built in somewhere in the lesson during which students discuss and/or share what they are discovering. Build that into your lesson. Talk can be in twos, or teams, or the whole group, but it should center on the lesson—not socialization. Students need to have a voice in their learning, but their desire to check-in with their peers needs to be kept in check.

Step Eleven: Plan to end the lesson with a strong finish. This will keep the students always returning in anticipation. Try a song, a student response, or even a review of posters made.

Step Twelve: Time for reflection and thanks. You need to know what they learned or what they have questions about *before they leave* so you can plan tomorrow's lesson around their interests. Ask for quiet reflection on paper, or a question on a note card, or exit tickets. And always thank them for their participation in your lesson and their good work.